OUT AND PROUD HEROES
The Coming Out Imperative in Superhero Films

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Outline

● Foucault and problematizing discourses of sexuality
● Superhero film as a technology of power
● Supergirl and the coming out imperative
● Eternals and experiments of living
Critical Review

- Repressive Hypothesis
- Deployment of Sexuality (discourses as a means of social control)
- Coming Out Imperative (as it contributes to essentialization and narratives of self-discovery)
- Neoliberal agenda
- “Bodies and pleasures” and a queer “ethos”
Why Superhero Media?

The genre has experienced a growth in popularity.

1\textsuperscript{st} Best picture nomination for \textit{Black Panther} and 6/10 of the most financially successful films of that year featured superheroes (McSweeney 15).

Mainstream film is the first point of contact for younger viewers.

Likely to be most normalizing influences on the public mind today, especially for queer youths (Cover 73-74).

The genre is behind in representing marginal identities.

Important for critics to give due attention to these genres to encourage continued representation and understand their effects.
Supergirl’s Alex Danvers
Alex’s Neoliberal Self-Fashioning

- Coming out as necessary for discovering/forming her identity
- Alex's resistance to fixed, stable identity
- Reinforcement of her fixed identity through coming out
KARA: And are you saying you’re gay too?
ALEX: I don’t know. I’m just trying to make sense of it all. It’s so complicated.
KARA: Alex, it kind of sounds like you’re coming out to me.
KARA: Have you felt like this before?
ALEX: Not like this.
KARA: Have you ever been with a girl?
ALEX: No. Never.
KARA: Okay, what’s different? I know you haven’t been dating much lately-
ALEX: This isn’t because I haven’t found the right guy!
KARA: I never said it was. I’m just- I’m just trying to understand, okay?
Alex’s Neoliberal Self-Fashioning

• Coming out as necessary for discovering/forming her identity
• Alex's resistance to fixed identity
• Normalization of stable identity through coming out
ALEX: Well, I told my mom.

MAGGIE: You did? How did she take it?

ALEX: Better than me. You know, when you first suggested that I was gay, I denied it. And then I thought that it was just about you. I mean, how could I not like you? But, you know, deep down, I think I still wasn’t comfortable that that was my new normal. But it is my new normal. And I’m happy that it is because I, uh, I don’t know, I finally, I get me. And now I realize that it wasn’t about you, but it’s about me living my life. So, thank you.
Eternals’ Phastos
Phastos and Experiments of Living

- Essential identity and choice
- Eternal/human binary as a metaphor for a queer/straight binary
- Deconstructing the binary through agency and “ethos”
IKARIS: I’m an Eternal, Phastos. I exist for Arishem. As do you. *It’s who you are.*

PHASTOS: I wouldn’t change a single thing about who I am. Born or made. But I do not exist for Arishem. I exist for my family!
Phastos and Experiments of Living

- Essential identity and choice
- Eternal/human binary as a metaphor for a queer/straight binary
- Deconstructing the binary through agency and “ethos”
Conclusion

Future opportunities for queer representation in mainstream superhero media.